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SUBJECT: GOF DECLINES TO RESPOND IN DETAIL TO LIBERTAD ACT  
EXEMPTION QUESTIONS

REF: 06 STATE 191752

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: After the MFA Cuba desk officer delayed for a month responding to USG reftel requests for an update on French activities in Cuba during 2006, then stated he did not intend to do so, DAS-equivalent Blandine Kreiss affirmed January 26 that the GOF objected to the extraterritorial reach of the Helms-Burton economic embargo and that the GOF therefore would not respond to USG questions related to the renewal of France's exemption from Libertad Act sanctions. Kreiss cited a 1998 agreement between the United States and the European Union as justification for suspending Helms-Burton reporting requirements and concluded by expressing the hope that this stance would not lead to a U.S. reaction, especially "at this time of transition in Cuba."  
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) In a January 26 conversation, DAS-equivalent Blandine Kreiss confirmed to POL Deputy a January 23 written response from MFA Desk officer for Cuba Othman El Kachtoul to Poloff, to the effect that the GOF rejected as a matter of principle the extra-territorial reach of Helms-Burton and therefore would not respond as a matter of principle to USG inquiries related to the renewal of France's exemption from possible Libertad Act sanctions. Both El Kachtoul and Kreiss cited the 1997 and 1998 agreements between the United States and the European Union suspending Title III of the Helms-Burton Amendment as justification for this refusal.

¶3. (SBU) Kreiss and El Kachtoul stated clearly that France largely shares U.S. policy objectives of encouraging democratization on the island. El Kachtoul had earlier indicated that France supported liberating all political prisoners and encouraged a process of transition toward democratic pluralism and respect for human rights, as well as improving the standard of living of the Cuban people. He noted in addition France's support in the UN Human Rights Council its support for a resolution on Cuba.

¶4. (SBU) Without enumerating specific French activities but referring indirectly to French intentions for the future, Kreiss noted continuing contact between France and civil society figures in Cuba and referred to a French invitation to invite Cuban journalists to France in coming weeks. Kreiss concluded with the hope that the GOF refusal to answer explicit questions about French activities in Cuba would not lead to a U.S. reaction, especially "at this time of transition in Cuba."

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